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# The War and the Left Wing Groups



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presents a proletarian internationalist program in the interest of the working class -- that is, its liberation from imperialism and its wars. Their positions range from shamefaced support of the war, to pacifism and vague expressions of support to the workers' everyday struggles for better conditions, to centrist formulas in which "revolutionary" language is accompanied by a program of capitulation to the war.

### A FORMULA OF CAPITULATION

The war is here, they say, and we must adjust ourselves to it. Obviously, revolutionary work for the emancipation of the proletariat must be "adjusted" to wartime conditions, must relate to the problems of the new situation, and specifically to the struggle against war in the concrete. But this elementary idea has nothing in common with what the centrists and opportunists mean by "adjust".

They propose to **accept** the existence of the war, express their **verbal** opposition at best **but not to fight it, not to oppose it in action.** They hope to shift the issue, to drop the anti-war fight, and try to improve the lot of the working class while the war goes on. There's a program of continued war.

It cannot be done. The war demands the

destruction of our living standards, degradation of our conditions, crushing of our democratic rights gained through many years of struggle. To keep these, even to fight for enough bread and butter, requires a struggle against the war itself. One without the other is impossible. To speak of improving the lot of the working masses without a concrete direct struggle against the war, is as utopian as the old socialist idea of achieving socialism through gradual social reforms and improvements without a direct and concrete struggle against capitalism. Those who desert the struggle against the war, desert the working class at the same time.

### THE I. W. W.

The worker who recalls the militant tradition established by the Wobblies during the last war, despite their lack of political understanding which eventually proved their doom, will feel sick at heart to read the "anti-war" editorial in the **Industrial Worker** of Dec. 15, 1941.

**". . . Its' still a capitalist war. of course... The offense of the Jap work-ox is one in which all of world labor has a share. Labor has not come**

forward with a better plan of running world affairs, at least, it has given no such plan the majority support required to put it into effect.

. . . Despite all this, the class struggle goes on. The hope for a better world never dies, neither does the struggle for improved conditions, for labor rights, and for final emancipation of the whole working class...

. . . Such items as higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions are always on the agenda. And it should be remembered that only in the everyday struggle for what is called immediate demands can the working class acquire the experience, education and organization it needs in order to become the general manager of everything in the classless world..."

What a miserable namby-pamby statement. Everything is the fault of the workers. Imagine a Bill Haywood or Frank Little or Joe Hill voicing such resigned, back-boneless mouthings when the need of the hour is a bold, defiant call, a stiffening and sharpening of the ANTI-WAR STRUGGLE of the working class.

## THE ANARCHISTS

The I.W.W. and the Anarchists think they can ignore the state and confine the struggle to a purely economic character. By denying the need of a struggle for a workers state, against the imperialist state, they blunt and nullify the struggle against the war. The door is opened to outright support of the war. At least one anarchist group has stepped through that door.

"...The main aim of the united forces of so technically able and productive a people as we in America must be to concentrate on the dual task that today confronts all progressive sections of the world — to win the war and not lose the peace..."

This is the social patriotic message of the **Free Voice of Labor** (Freie Arbeiter Stimme, Dec. 19, 1911), organ of the Jewish anarchists centered largely in Philadelphia and the east coast.

Could anything be more despicable — to call on the working class to support the imperialists and their war in the hope of a "just" peace to be established afterwards by the imperialism of the world! The lessons of the

last war, of the 25 years of imperialism since, are completely washed away for these "social thinkers".

(We wish to point out that this is only one anarchist group; we do not yet know the positions taken by others).

## THE THOMAS SOCIALISTS

The propaganda for a "democratic, anti-imperialist peace" is a lie and a deception of the international working class. It objectively fits the needs of the liberals and social patriots who carry on a "struggle" against the Tories in war time for the purpose of throwing sops to the masses to insure their support to the war. The pacifist or non-revolutionary stand on the war, coupled with the "just peace" swindle, amounts to left support to the social patriots. This is the position of the Socialists.

The pacifism of the socialists flows directly from their view that the working class can come to power through the existing capitalist state, can take it over and operate it for working class ends. The Socialists do not see the state as the executive committee of the ruling class.

Nothing could better expose the degeneration of the Socialist Party than the fact that its

official head, Norman Thomas, can publicly announce his weasel support of the war, at the same time that the party's National Committee takes a pacifist position against the war. It is hard to say which statement is the more sickening.

In the **Socialist Call**, Dec. 20, 1941, Thomas says:

— "...The despotic military clique which today controls the destiny of Japan, following the despicable modern technique, by an act of premeditated treachery, while its ministers were still talking peace in Washington, attacked American territory (!), American forces and American civilians... (This is a "socialist" talking. — Ed.)

"...Our boys — our sons, our brothers — are involved in war on land, sea and air. Unquestionably the country is behind them. Its heart is with them...

"...Conceivably American arms may ultimately win the war and American democracy lose the peace. Hence the necessity that we redouble our zeal for achievement of true

democracy at home, and the working out of such plans for peace as will be an inspiration and a challenge to the peoples of the world...

"...I would not divert any American energy from the present by futile mourning over the past... (our emphasis).

In the same issue, the official statement of the National Action Committee says:

"...This war (is) the culmination of a long struggle of European, American and Asiatic imperialism for advantage and dominance in the Far East — an imperialist struggle which we opposed and continue to oppose...

"...The fight to preserve and extend the procedures and institutions of democracy in the very midst of war; the fight for civil liberties, . . . rights of labor . . . racial tolerance . . . living standards . . . democratic socialism. These, with the struggle for anti-imperialist war aims and anti-imperialist democratic peace, . . . are the main issues . . ."

This statement was ratified by the National Executive Committee (Call, Jan. 3, 1942), which also issued a supplementary statement of elaboration along the above lines. So rotten is the S. P.'s stand that two members of its National Committee, Lillian Symes and Travers Clement, Call editor, accused the majority of being for the war and lacking the courage to say so.

The war is here and we have now to fight to save "democracy", say the socialists (the capitalist institutional forms of democracy, of course). True, the imperialists are warring for "advantage and dominance in the Far East", but lets try to prevail on them to establish an anti-imperialist peace! Ask the tiger to stop eating meat. Ask the boss to run his plant without profit.

To conduct a working class struggle against the war — unthinkable. To support the Latin American, Philippine, Malayan, East Indian, Chinese, Indian masses in their struggle for freedom and liberation from **all** imperialisms — yes, tomorrow, after the war, but not now. Call on the imperialists to grant this liberation, but don't do anything yourself.

A difference exists between Thomas and the National Executive Committee, but it is a

difference in **words**. In **action** both will play along behind the war plans and the war drive — a "loyal opposition" to capitalism.

## THE CANNON TROTSKYITES

Of all the left wing groups, the Cannonites were the only ones from whom the open entry of American imperialism into the second world war failed to bring forth a single official word of comment!

WAR — the culmination of a whole process of imperialist contradictions and struggles; the opening up of a period of mass propaganda and mass hysteria, slaughter, hunger and disease; a stage of political capitulations, renegades and desertions to the enemy; WAR — **the** time of all times for the revolutionists to speak out clearly, to strengthen the lines of at least the more advanced workers: WAR came, and the declaration of war elicited not a single word from the Cannon Trotskyites.

These people are fond of orating long and loud about war being the test of revolutionists. How miserably they failed that test! At first their leading people gave the excuse that the war came before they could get back from ~~the trial~~, but the next issue would carry a statement. The next issue ~~appeared~~ — without a

statement. Did the trial and conviction weigh too heavily upon them? We hesitate to ascribe such a motive to their failure to speak out. But whatever the reasons, **politically** it is capitulation to the war pressure.

Under the circumstances we can discuss only the testimony of the trial, as it relates to their war position, altho it was made prior to the U. S. entry and deals abstractly with imperialist war in general.

It is not a pleasant task — analyzing this testimony. Next to the Stalinists, the Cannonites merit second place as adept in the noble art of parodying each new and fiscal revision of Marxism as the latest in Marxism at the moment. And they do this with a smug self-conceit that is peculiarly their own. Force yourself to read to the end, for example, of the scabbings of Felix Morrow, editor of the **Militant**, over the "brilliant", "historic" spectacle of Cannon crowfishing on every vital point at the Minneapolis trial.

## "MASTERFUL EXPOSITION OF PRINCIPLES"

Many Cannon members have tried to excuse the statements at the trial on the grounds that a full clear Marxist declaration would have brought far heavier sentences. For one

thing, this is an unwarranted assumption that the centrism of the Cannon Trotskyists is Marxism. For another, it is an indirect condemnation of the Cannon leadership who in a trial of such a character, reneged on even its own positions.

But the Cannonite leadership takes no such attitude. To them the statements at the trial are to be taken at their face value, as true Marxism.

They do not say that under the circumstances they did not present their full position on this or that question, but only part of their position, and omitted the "extra-legal" parts. On the contrary, they themselves brought in the extra-legal parts, and specifically rejected them. In other words, according to Cannon and Morrow, the material at the trial, as it stands, is "historic", "for the education of future generation to come". They are going to educate and build their organization on the program presented there.

We hope to discuss in another article the general questions raised in Cannon's testimony. Here we shall limit ourselves to the Cannonite position in relation to the war.

### **ENCOURAGES BOURGEOIS LEGALISM**

Throughout his testimony, Cannon deliber-

ately blurs over the decisive question of the road to power, encourages parliamentary illusions. From the way he poses his position on force and violence, he introduces the reformist view that the working class can take power through the existing capitalist state machinery. The Cannonite support to the Ludlow amendment for a vote on war ("with criticism" — everything they do is "with criticism", as this negates the opportunism) worked in the same direction — encouraging bourgeois legalism among the masses.

The same effect is conveyed by the words: "If the majority of people decide on war, and participate in the war, our people...will also participate..." (MILITANT, Dec. 13, page 4). In what imperialist country has the majority of the people had anything to say on the war? Is this legalism the kind of "education" Cannon has in store for his members?

### **CONSCRIPTION AND MILITARY TRAINING**

The Cannonites are proud of their heavily supported conscription. They called for "the government to set up, finance and equip camps, under trade union auspices, for military training and training of officers!" In the last war the government did this for business men aspiring to become officers.



Of course, there is a certain difference between businessmen and workers, but this doesn't bother the Cannonites. The war is a capitalist war, not a workman's war; on this case it is irrelevant to the Cannonites.

Train the workers under the control of the labor leaders, the social patriots and war imperialists in control of the trade unions: teach the workers to become "good soldiers". What will be the effect of this? Will it strengthen the workers' illusions about the capitalist government, or will it teach him that the war is imperialist, not his war? But that too is not the point.

Under the excuse that all workers nowadays need military training (as if the capitalists will not give it to us), the Cannonites gave **support** to the conscription drive, **support** to the campaign of the ruling class to line up the masses for the war.

### "GOOD SOLDIERS"

Cannon calls on his members to be "good soldiers in the army; in the same sense they are good workers in the factory..."

He rejects any idea of sabotage, presenting it entirely as an individual act. What has this to do with working class action to disrupt the slaughter, for profit and to cripple the exploiters

war efforts and frightful **social sabotage** of the needs and interests of the people and society!

He denies that his party advocates insubordination in the army, laying it down as a broad rule without exceptions.

What does all this add up to? Cannon is specific: his party will carry on a "political opposition" to the war. Asked to elaborate, he stated: "Well, insofar as we are permitted our rights, we would speak against the war as a false policy that should be changed, in the same sense, from our point of view, that other parties might oppose the foreign policy of the government in time of war, just as Lloyd George, for example, opposed the Boer war in public addresses and speeches. Ramsay MacDonald, who later became Prime Minister of England, opposed the war policy of England during the World War of 1914-18. We hold our own point of view, which is different from the point of view of the two political figures I have just mentioned, and so far as we are permitted to exercise our right, we would continue to write and speak for a different foreign policy for America." (Militant, Dec. 6, page 3).

Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald, and James P. Cannon -- all in the same category.

At the same time Cannon endorses various quotations from his Party's literature in the past to the effect of the need for a revolutionary struggle to turn the imperialist war into a civil war.

This is the essence of centrism: present one program in one breath, and its opposite in the next.

It is on the question of revolutionary defeatism that Cannon's testimony becomes really "historic".

Referring to a quotation from the Manifesto of the Trotskyite Fourth International, calling for fraternization and a revolutionary struggle against war, the prosecution asks: "And do you not think that promulgating those ideas in the army during the war would obstruct the military efforts?"

Cannon replies: **"Not in the sense of opening up the Front for the advantage of the opposing armies, no. We are offering this solution to the soldiers of all the imperialist armies, but it does not mean and could not mean in any sense that we want to sabotage the operation of the American Army in the interests of an opposing army. You will not find it there, or anywhere else in our literature."** (Militant, Dec. 13, page 5).

Goldman in his opening speech was equally clear: **"The Socialist Workers Party opposes sabotage... The claim that we prefer the enemy, the imperialist enemy of the United States to defeat our government is absolutely false... We have never advocated the idea of insubordination in the army..."** (Nov. 8, 1941).

### CHARACTER OF THE WAR

The Cannonite rejection of revolutionary defeatism is one side of their anti-war program. The other side is their slogan to **"turn the imperialist war into a war against fascism"**, and the slogan for a Labor Party. Should a Labor Party come into control of the government, and continue the war under the battle-cry of a workers' war against fascism, what would become of the Cannonite "political opposition" to the war?

Cannon lays down a theoretical basis for changing his position on the character of the war as imperialist by his discussion of the Trotskyite policies pursued in the Spanish civil war (a question in itself). He compares the Spanish war of classes with the imperialist war, mechanically transfers the policies from the one situation to the other.

But particularly on the Labor Party ques-

tion does the whole "anti-war" program of the Cannonites plumb the depths of opportunism, lay down a line which will sabotage the working class struggle for liberation, and lay the basis for revising their position on the character of the war. We will take this up in more detail below.

## THE SHACHTMAN TROTSKYITES

Unlike the Cannonites, the Shachtman group issued a long manifesto, clearly and boldly denouncing the imperialist war, proclaimed this a war to decide "which of the imperialist groups shall dominate the world", and the U. S. enters the war to "challenge ALL competitors and to assert its imperialist rights to mastery of the world and its wealth."

The Shachtmanites reject the Cannon program of advocating military training under trade union control. On the other hand, on the Soviet Union, they are to the right of Cannon. Except for these points, however, the Shachtmanite program, presented in more militant terms, is very close to that of the Cannon group.

There is a sharp difference in that the Shachtmanites speak **after** the entry of the U.S.

into the war — the Cannonites only before.

## THE SHACHTMAN PROGRAM

"...Hands off the right to organize... strike... free speech... press... assembly..

"...Hands off the standards of living of the working class... Double pay for all overtime... A capital levy on all corporations. Confiscate the great private fortunes of the "Sixty Families"... Wipe out all...discrimination against the Negro people... Full political rights to the men in the Army...

"...Organize OUR OWN National Labor Party, of for and by Labor, founded on its powerful organizations, the unions, and authorized to speak and act for labor in the political fields. Labor must have its own ticket in the 1942 elections.

"...For a workers government in the U. S.

"...The workers must and will replace the capitalist system with the order of socialism, and bring an end to the bloody carnegie, to all exploitation and oppression.

Long live the international solidarity of all the peoples. Long live the socialist struggle for peace and freedom and security. Long live the triumph of the socialist world. (**Labor Action**, Dec. 15, 1941).

This is the anti-war manifesto of the Shachtmanites. Bold generalities, revolutionary phrasemongering at its worst. But a revolutionary program? Defeatism? Nothing.

How far the American radical movement has shifted to the right is shown by the fact that the confused and sterile centrism of the Shachtman Trotskyites is the furthest to the "left". The Cannonites are to the right of them.

In recognizing this difference, we should also note that the Shachtmanites have not yet established themselves as an independent political tendency. As the war pressure grows it will push the Cannon Trotskyites more to the right. But pressure on the Shachtmanites will tend to split their group, driving some to Cannon and to the right, and others to the left.

### **BRITISH INDEPENDENT LABOR PARTY**

For a better appreciation of the value of the Shachtman program, compare it to that of the British I.L.P.

The I.L.P. "resolutely opposes a Nazi vic-

tory", but "on the other hand it could not support a victory of a capitalist imperialism which treats millions of its Indian and colonial subjects in the way Britain does." It condemns the "British ruling class... seeking the establishment of a British hegemony over Europe, subordinate financially to the U. S. A...." (**British New Leader**, April 19, 1941).

It stands also for better conditions, to "end profiteering", for "democracy in the Empire", and for a "socialist Britain".

The I. L. P. proposes to accomplish all this by revolutionary work in Europe -- and electoral activity in Britain. The Shachtmanites propose -- a Labor Party in the U. S.

### **THE LABOR PARTY**

What is the meaning of the Trotskyite, both Cannon and Shachtman, support to the Labor Party? Why is the Labor Party slogan put forward today as practically the centralizing slogan of their agitation?

This position conceals an entire rejection of revolutionary internationalism, a direct betrayal of working class interests.

The Labor Party is not a trade union; it is a political party founded on the trade unions, controlled by the jingoist labor bureaucrats, and

operating as a third capitalist party to tie the working class to the imperialist war machine.

The Labor Party program is the program of imperialist war. It is a program of reforms, of begging and accepting the crumbs from the imperialist table. Some remarks by Lenin on the German opportunists in the last war are strikingly apropos here:

"The liberal bourgeoisie (and their agents in the labor movement, that is, the opportunists), in order to influence the workers and the masses in general, are ready to swear allegiance to internationalism any number of times, to accept the slogan of peace, to renounce the annexationist aims of the war, to condemn chauvinism, anything **EXCEPT** revolutionary action against their own government, anything that would justify being "against defeat".

"In point of fact, this ideology, mathematically speaking, is both **necessary** and **sufficient** to fool the workers. One cannot offer them less because it is impossible to rally the masses without promising them a just peace, without scaring them with the danger of invasion, without swearing allegiance to internationalism; one need not offer them more, because all that is "more" (that is, the seizure of colonies, the annexation of foreign territories, the

pillaging of foreign countries, the attainment of advantageous treaties) will be carried out, **not** by the liberal bourgeoisie directly, but by imperialist - militarist governmental war clique after the war.

**"The roles are well distributed; while the government and the military clique, supported by the billionaires and by all the bourgeois "men of affairs", wage the war, the liberals comfort and fool the masses by national-defensive war ideology, by the promises of a democratic peace, etc."**

The so-called revolutionists who call on the working class to support the Labor Party, however "critically", thereby are giving support to the open supporters of the war.

Even more subtly, the Labor Party agitation strengthens the national chauvinist ideas in the masses, strengthens the bourgeois ideology in the labor movement.

Today, when the task above all tasks is the merciless criticism and exposure of the traitors, the opportunists, the social patriots, support to the Labor Party is support to the enemies of the working class.

Discussing the question of unity with the opportunists, Lenin spoke almost directly at the Trotskyites:

"On all important questions... the opportunists confront the party with their ultimatum, the acceptance of which is secured through their numerous connections with the bourgeoisie, through their majorities on the executive committees of the labor unions, etc. To keep **UNITED** with opportunism at the present time means **PRACTICALLY** to subjugate the working class to "its" bourgeoisie, to make an alliance with it for the oppression of other nations and for the struggle for the privileges of a great nation; at the same time it means **splitting** the revolutionary proletariat of all countries."

Lenin called upon class conscious workers who found themselves in the political organizations controlled by the opportunists to **split** from the social-patriots. The Trotskyites take the **opposite** road: form a common political organization **together with** the opportunists, and put the traitors in control!

Only the "revolutionists" with a **bourgeois democratic** ideology can think of the Labor Party as an aid in the political development of the working class; can fail to realize that the Labor Party agitation and organization will further encourage the deeply rooted ideas of bourgeois legality and parliamentarism in the

American masses, and will restrain the development of the struggle; can fail to recognize that the Labor Party movement will strengthen the fatal illusion that the working class can come to power peacefully, through taking over the existing capitalist state machinery.

As the war pressure grows, the bourgeoisie will need a loyal opposition of the left, since the present trade union and reformist leaders who openly support capitalism and the war will begin to lose authority among the masses.

In England and Australia, where this stage is already being reached, this is actually taking place. The Australian Labor Party is in full leadership of the government -- for the capitalists.

The Trotskyites cover up their support of the social patriots by making secondary criticisms of the Labor Party and attacking **individual** leaders and policies. Their continued propaganda for a Labor Party, however, shows they are bidding, consciously or no, for positions of leadership in a Labor Party government.

The Trotskyite support of the Labor Party is the current form of their line of tailending the opportunists and social patriots. Yesterday, this line was expressed in the entry into the

Socialist Party, then in the support of the Ludlow amendment. In France they called for a Blum-Cachin government; in Spain for a Caballero - C.N.T. government.

Defense of class collaboration, renunciation of the idea of a social revolution and of revolutionary methods of struggle, adaptation to bourgeois nationalism and bourgeois legalism, abolition of the class viewpoint and the class struggle out of fear of repelling the "broad masses of the population" (read — petty bourgeoisie) — these are the political threads which make up the Labor Party agitation.

The rope made from these strands is a hangman's noose for the proletariat. The revolutionist who helps weave this rope, and then blinds the proletariat with revolutionary rhetoric, is not a revolutionist — he is an enemy agent.

## **A WORKING CLASS PROGRAM AGAINST THE WAR**

Because it is so easily grasped, the Labor Party question stands out as the crudest corruption of Marxism by the Trotskyites. But far more fundamental, far more serious in the long run, is the rejection of the program of revolutionary defeatism as the key for the struggle

against the war, for transforming the imperialist war into a war against the exploiters, for workers power.

Revolutionists are not for the victory of either the enemy or their own ruling class in the imperialist war. Revolutionists support the interests of the working class and the masses of the people. In each country, the main enemy of the working class is right at home — its own capitalist class.

In sheer self defense against the mass murder, the working class will be driven into struggle against the imperialists and their war, will be forced into struggle to overthrow the ruling class and establish its own system of production for use under workers control. The unbearable conditions of life brought on by the war will force the working class to continue on this course, even if it means the defeat of its own exploiting class by the enemy ruling class.

### **LENIN'S PROGRAM**

As Lenin pointed out, "such defeats facilitate the struggle of the masses to take power and put an end to the slaughter." Revolutionists do not seek to help the victory of the "enemy" (that would be working class betrayal), but "call on the working class in ALL the capitalist countries to assist the development of

the international workers revolution against the exploiters."

**"Only a bourgeois who believes that the war started by the governments will necessarily end as a war between governments, and who wishes it to be so, finds 'ridiculous' or 'absurd' the idea of the socialists**

**of all the belligerent countries should express their wish that ALL 'their' governments be defeated**

"If perish we must, let us perish in the struggle for our own cause, for the cause of the workers, for the socialist revolution and not for the interests of the capitalists, landowners, and Tsars -- that is what every class conscious workers sees and feels. Revolutionary social democratic (Marxist) work may be difficult at present, but it is possible. It progresses in the whole world, and in this alone lies salvation."

To endorse on paper the proletarian revolutionary program for a fight against the war, and to stop there, would be no more than lip service to the struggle.

Today more than ever is needed the most intense activity in defense of workers rights and interests against the attack of the capital-

ist reaction. The class struggle for the economic, political and social rights of the working class and the oppressed minorities and colonials is the only road to emancipation of the world working class. But the central and coordinating theme of all this activity, the thread binding it into a unified whole, giving it direction and meaning, is the program of revolutionary **defeatism**.

For, no matter how intense the activity, to reject this program is to conduct activity without regard to its aim and goal, to flounder about a mess of contradictions, open wide the flood gates of the gigantic bourgeois pressure -- at the same time denying the one proletarian weapon of ideological resistance. It is impossible to continue on this line without capitulation to the bourgeoisie.

To build a revolutionary party in the U.S. that will defend and advance the historic interests of the working class, is the desire of every class conscious worker. The first step in this direction is to break with social patriotism and opportunism, to unite with the revolutionists.